DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 184 120 **CS 205 420**

AUTHOR Lewis, Flossie

TITLE The Involuntary Conversion of a 727 or CRASH!: Some Ways and Means to Deflate the Inflated Style with a New Look at Orwell's "Politics and the English Language". Curriculum Publication No. 10.

INSTITUTION California Univ., Berkeley. School of Education.
SPONS AGENCY Carnegie Corp. of New York, N.Y.; National Endowment for the Humanities (NFAH), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 41p.
AVAILABLE FROM Publications Department, Bay Area Writing Project, 5635 Tolman Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720 ($1.50 postage and handling)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Problems; Expository Writing; *Language Usage; Metaphors; Secondary Education; *Teaching Methods; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Exercises; Writing Instruction; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Bay Area Writing Project

ABSTRACT

This booklet is one of a series of teacher-written curriculum publications launched by the Bay Area Writing Project, each focusing on a different aspect of the teaching of composition. Methods are illustrated for teaching students to recognize dishonest language and to write honestly themselves and include cliche/euphemism avoidance techniques, word precision exercises, and practice in recognizing jargon. (AEA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED184120

The Involuntary Conversion of a 727 or CRASH!

Some Ways and Means to Deflate the Inflated Style with a New Look at Orwell's "Politics and the English Language"

By

FLOSSIE LEWIS
(FLORENCE C. LEWIS)

Author: Teacher of English, San Francisco Public Schools.
Lynch Fellow, UC Berkel :y, 1979

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Bay Area Writing Project

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS205420

Bay Area Writing Project
University of California, Berkeley

Curriculum Publication No. 10

BAY AREA WRITING PROJECT
CURRICULUM PUBLICATIONS

1. *The California High School Proficiency Examination: Evaluating the Writing Samples* by Ruby S. Bernstein and Bernard R. Tanner
   Explains the holistic procedures used in evaluating the writing samples, including student papers representing the range of student responses.

2. *Independent Study and Writing* by Sarah Dandridge, John Harter, Rob Kessler, Miles Myers, and Susan Thomas
   Addressed to teachers, parents, and students, this booklet describes various independent study programs in grades kindergarten through twelve, and focuses on writing as a way for students to integrate their learning in such a program.

3. *Formative Writing: Writing to Assist Learning in All Subject Areas* by Virginia Draper
   Shows how teachers in all areas can use writing to enhance student learning of subject matter.

4. *Come On Out—The War's Over or Making Peace with English 1-A* by Roger Mueller
   Describes the way in which the author's experience with the Bay Area Writing Project was translated into effective ideas for organizing and teaching a writing course.

5. *Working Out Ideas: Predication and Other Uses of Language* by Josephine Miles
   This collection of essays, all on the theme of "the power of students to compose their thoughts and the power of teaching to help them," spans the years of Miles's thinking, teaching, and inspiring of teachers.

6. *The Tutor and the Writing Student: A Case Study* by Jerry Herman
   Following the progress of a single student as she works one-to-one with a tutor in the writing center at Laney College, Herman shows how to help the student recognize and use the knowledge she already possesses to improve her skills.

7. *Expectation and Cohesion* by Gordon Pradl
   Pradl explicates some of the basic principles of cohesion in writing and suggests exercises which will help students discover these principles.

8. *An Experiment in Encouraging Fluency* by Miriam Ylvisaker
   With pre- and post-writing samples, Ylvisaker illustrates the results of her experiment in using a student-centered Writing Workshop class to improve the fluency of her reluctant writers.

9. *Writing for the Inexperienced Writer: Fluency Shape Correctness* by Marlene Griffith
   Through the work of three beginning writers in a college writing center, Griffith describes the evolving relationship between fluency and shape, and fluency and correctness in writing.

10. *The Involuntary Conversion of a 727 or CRASH!: Some Ways and Means to Deflate the Inflated Style with a New Look at Orwell's "Politics and the English Language"* by Flossie Lewis
    Illustrates methods for teaching students to recognize dishonest language and to write honestly themselves.

To order, send $1.50 postage and handling for each title to: Publications Department, Bay Area Writing Project, 5635 Tolman Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.

Future Titles:
Writing Class: Teacher and Students Writing Together by Dick Friss
Using Student Writing Response Groups in the Classroom by Mary K. Healy
Sequences in Writing, Grades K-13 by Gail Siegel, Lynda Chittenden, Jean Jensen, and Jan Wall

The Bay Area Writing Project is an effort by school teachers, college faculty, and curriculum specialists to improve the teaching of writing at all levels of education. The Project is funded by the CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK, the NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES, and the UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY. The findings of this study do not necessarily represent the views of the National Endowment for the Humanities or the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Individuals desiring information concerning The Bay Area Writing Project or the National Writing Project should write to Bay Area Writing Project, Tolman Hall, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720.

Cover design: Gene Izuno

Copyright © 1979 Bay Area Writing Project, University of California, Berkeley.

Preface

Flossie Lewis loves the English language. People who use it for vicious ends, people who use it to obscure meaning, or people who just don't care whether their words match their meanings, infuriate her.

Taking her cues from George Orwell, Lewis presents here a creative series of exercises to teach students to recognize deceptive language in others and to avoid it in their own writing. Woven throughout these stimulating and immediately useful exercises Lewis gives us as a bonus her own witty and perceptive thoughts on the ways misuse of language supports the barbarism and violence of our time.

James Gray, *Director*
Bay Area Writing Project
School of Education
University of California, Berkeley

Acknowledgement

I did not become a teacher of composition until one of my own teachers, Professor Alex Zwerdling of the University of California at Berkeley, gave me as an assignment George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language." It struck like lightning. It quickened my thinking and my style. I should like to thank the Bay Area Writing Project for asking me to do this little book, and I should like to thank those who assisted me in the editing and the typing: Cathy and Scott Keech, Miriam Yivisaker, Ann Watkins, Rachel Kimball, and Janet Kodish.

Flossie Lewis

Introduction

In 1946 George Orwell defined the language of politics as "the defense of the indefensible." Political language today is still the defense of the indefensible. It is also the denial of reality.

I am asking that as teachers of composition, we think about language, that we respect it *not* as something that has a life of its own without our poor power to direct or correct it. For then we owe the language nothing, and our language, in turn, owes us less. For you and I know that words and actions have very strong ties. And when scholars, philosophers, literary critics, respected journalists, and last but certainly not least, teachers of English begin to worry about Saving the English Language, or Double-speak, or The Art of Bull, what is it we worry about, the language or the self, our actions as much as our words..?

Elizabeth Hall interviewing George Steiner in an article for *Psychology Today* asked Steiner why he as a critic of literature should talk so much about concentration camps. Steiner explained that he always believed human savagery and killing were caused by lack of education. But then he began to wonder: "Could there be certain things right inside culture that somehow helped barbarism... Perhaps we build up tremendous frustrations about physical violence in a world where language has become the substitute for action."

Myself, I am fairly certain that some things inside our culture support barbarism and violence. It may be, as Steiner suggests, that language has become a substitute for action, but language is still our means to discover and express what is happening to us. Men fight and die for a word. They may fight and die because they are surrounded by words. They may fight and die for lack of a word. They may die without fighting. There are areas in us which are yet inexpressible, but when we ask if our language can be saved, we are asking in fairly plain talk whether our minds can be saved ...from dying for lack of a word or dying from battling phantoms and being betrayed by them.

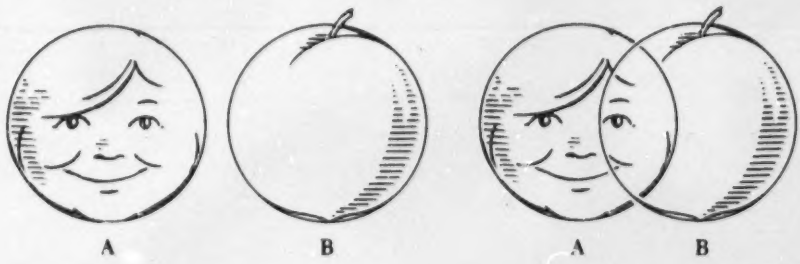
Orwell said earlier (1946) that the decadence of our language is probably curable. And he gave us six "Canadian Air-Force Exercises" by which to cure ourselves. It means doing these exercises regularly. I propose to work with Orwell's six rules, but to modify them somewhat in light of what I see happening to our language. The rules won't make sense to us unless we know and have by our sides Orwell's "Politics and the English Language."

For I do not, cannot, presume to rewrite this essay, but in order to update the rules and suggest lessons by which we can teach the rules, I will have to suggest those areas in our language and our thinking where, I believe, we are walking around in the mud or drifting around without touching the ground. I will have to intrude my own philosophy from time to time.

My philosophy begins with this proposition: teachers of composition have a moral responsibility, whether we are teaching bright, average, or "disaffected" children, and the responsibility is to the word, the sentence, and the idea. Words are powerful. They can enlighten. They can save hearts and minds. They can also corrupt and destroy. They can support barbarism or encourage it. Sticks and stones are not alone: words break bones. More than break, they can make it appear that no hurt has occurred; no bones were there to begin with.

Orwell's First Rule

Orwell's first rule is *Never use a metaphor, a simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.* First a lesson about figures of speech, a few little pieces of verse, some ballads, some rock lyrics to illustrate that we use metaphors all the time. The big job that awaits us is to make clear the relationship between metaphor and the inflated style, between metaphor and euphemism. But we can't take that step until we know what metaphor is. In addition to a formal lesson on figures of speech, or even to take the place of such a lesson, we can explain metaphor graphically by "intersection":



> Let circle A be somebody's face and circle B a peach or a nectarine or whatever fruit makes good comparisons possible. If, now, we say that a boy or a girl resembles a nectarine or a tangerine, it must be that A and B have some common characteristics. So we list the characteristics of the face and the fruit separately and then abstract the common traits. Or we can suggest at once what traits A and B share: smooth skin, red cheeks, the kind you like "to bite." What we begin to see is that the two circles or two sets can be said to intersect.

The idea is fairly simple. It acknowledges the separateness of being but it also forces us to see a unity. The two sets meet at some point. In discovering that a face is like a nectarine, we see the face in a new way. Kids like this game of intersection. It's a good way to talk about metaphor. And then we can send our students to the dictionary or the glossary of

literary terms, and the definition of metaphor is no longer so terribly abstract. We can even define "tenor" and "vehicle" by this method.

FLOWERS AND HEARTS

Next, you can bring flowers, a bowl of fruit, mushrooms, or seashells to school. If you start with flowers, what the kids are going to discover rather quickly is that the names for some of the flowers are already metaphor...daisy, snapdragon, golden rod, buttercup. Holding a flower or a mushroom, you ask the class to write at least one thing that it reminds them of. Remind the class that they must return to being kids again when they play this game because little people don't usually borrow their ideas from others. They're not ashamed to say what comparisons first pop into their heads, that something looks like something else, even though they may be punished for what they say (e.g. telling a pregnant lady that she's swollen or that she looks like a balloon). Some of your students will produce nothing—for whatever reason—but you will have five or six who will be able to see shooting stars, paintbrushes, pin cushions in a flower. Seashells are marvelous, too. The point is the class doesn't have to struggle to define metaphor. It's all around them. They use them every day. The class should ditto or publish its new names for flowers, seashells and mushrooms. They can also play intersection.

Here are some excellent ways to define metaphor in addition to "the implied comparison," which really means nothing to kids. I have better luck with these:

1. Metaphor looks for the common in the uncommon.
2. Metaphor is the conscious naming of one object or idea for another because these objects or ideas share analogies.
3. Metaphor is trying to fit a single instance or a separate fact into a totality.
4. Metaphor is not analogy.
5. Metaphor is a transition, a crossing over, an intersection.
6. Metaphor is the result of concentrating or really looking, seeing, or thinking. It is the heightening of experience.
7. Metaphor is the expansion of a single perception which we carry beyond its boundaries by seeing it in more and more relations.

FROM THE FLOWER TO THE EUPHEMISM

Now, you supply the class with a list of pretty terms and ask them to supply the source, the original.

1. visually handicapped
2. sanitary engineer
3. selective service
4. midriff bulge
5. underarm
6. memory garden
7. liberate
8. selected out
9. verbalize
10. perspire

Here are the answers (you may prefer a matching question): 1) blind, 2) janitor, 3) draft-military, 4) fat, 5) armpit, 6) cemetery, an older euphemism, 7) grab, 8) fired (fired as from a job), 9) talk, 10) sweat.

Here's another list:

1. unmentionables
2. severe norm violators
3. overachiever
4. effectuate an activity
5. price adjustment
6. overindulgence
7. underachiever
8. participatory democracy
9. slumber room
10. to plot a career strategy
11. protective reaction air strike

a. we bomb them before they bomb us
b. a grind
c. to find another job
d. inflation
e. making a pig of yourself
f. underwear
g. a kid who fails in school
h. a yelling or screaming match
i. to get a kid (or an adult) to do something he doesn't want to do
j. for corpses
k. young lawbreaker*

Answers: (1-f) (2-k) (3-b) (4-i) (5-d) (6-e) (7-g) (8-h) (9-j) (10-c) (11-a)

HOW TO TELL A LIE IN YOUR OWN LIVING ROOM

We have to define euphemism along with Orwell's first rule. For euphemism is the term that embraces all of the illnesses that Orwell attacks, euphemism that falls like snow, that covers like a blanket, that pours like syrup, that perfumes the air with smells that remind the nose vaguely of pine or lemon or spice but sure doesn't smell like the real thing. If we are able to define the euphemism, and I mean by definition, write an intelligent paragraph on the subject, then we can make better sense of Orwell's first rule: Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print. We can even change this rule to fit

*Many of the terms in both lists come from an article by Alan Lockwood in *The San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle*, March 19, 1972.

the needs of those kids who aren't accustomed to seeing anything in print. "Never borrow from television a phrase which sounds good but really says nothing. Never take what isn't yours. Look for yourself, hear for yourself, taste for yourself, see for yourself, feel for yourself. Don't let canned words do your thinking. Try to be honest when you write. Sometimes thinking is hard; the right word doesn't come easily, but try to find the right word. If you try, you won't lie."

But how to make kids conscious of euphemism as a device they should avoid? To call a janitor a sanitary engineer is not such a terrible thing. Besides, if you give men and women fancier titles, they can ask for better wages and more respect. But many people use euphemism to spare themselves and others hurt. And the little soft lie needs to be examined before it becomes a habit—to be nice even when the situation no longer requires gentility.

Here are several situations in which you, a member of our class, may or may not find yourself. Even if you are incapable of stealing a pickle from a barrel or a cookie from a jar, try to do this exercise. All you have to do is supply a "nicer" word or phrase for the real thing, a word or phrase that makes you feel better or look better.

1. You steal money from your mother or father's wallet.
2. You copy from your neighbor's paper during an exam.
3. You beat up your kid brother or sister.
4. For a homework assignment, you copy several pages from a library reference book and turn in these pages without revealing whose words you have taken and what book you have used.
5. You wreck your dad or mother's automobile.
6. You wreck your own automobile.
7. You forge your father's signature to a check.
8. You walk off with a transistor from Macy's department store.
9. You break into the school's audio-visual lab and take three tape recorders and all the cassettes you can carry.
10. You take drugs regularly.

You can add to this list if you like. Remember the instructions. You want a softer way, perhaps a more guiltless way, to express these actions. You may come up with several phrases for one action and get absolutely blocked on another. It's O.K. Here's an example of what I want you to do. Someone you know has cancer. What do you regularly say? Do you say cancer? You say someone has "a very serious illness" or a "terminal condition." Get the picture? Try these ten. You may discover that you can't come up with a word or a phrase, but you can produce a fairly good excuse for some of these actions. *Write* the excuse. Once you've

written the excuse, the chances are you'll find the word or words that help you disguise what you've done.

Some definitions of euphemism in addition to "the mild or the indirect or the falsely delicate for the harsh or the real": 1) language that makes good what is basically rotten; 2) a lot of cosmetics to cover a dirty neck and face; 3) perfume to cover an unwashed body. A kid put it this way: "If it's metaphor, it's not euphemism." He was on his way.

The Euphemism of the Year

From Herb Caen, in *The San Francisco Chronicle*, July 19, 1978: "National Airlines stockholders are receiving an extra 18 cents a share dividend because a Boeing 727 crashed." The 727, it seems, was so heavily insured that National made an after-tax insurance benefit of 1.7 million dollars for the airline and for the three people who were killed in that crash. That's pretty neat. People with shares in National, the only way to fly, got another eighteen cents attached to what they already were getting. But even neater is the way National Airlines refers to the crash that killed three...but made a million. In the stockholder's report, the crash is, "an involuntary conversion of a 727."* Caen says, "It's the euphemism of the year." But it's meaning I'm after. What does it mean? Is involuntary conversion a good metaphor for crash? Why not say crash?

Whether kids are in a "good" school, a "difficult" school, or a junior college, they won't yawn or groan or cry they're bored if you ask them to tell you *why* the airline couldn't say "crash." But to help them along, here are some topics for discussion or composition.

1. What's an automobile crash? What happens? You've witnessed several crashes in your Driver Ed. training. Describe a crash. Make us see that crash.
2. Picture the crash of a 727. How are you going to describe it? Be quite literal and matter of fact because you want to concentrate on the facts. You're an engineer.
3. You are a reporter at the scene of an airline crash. What do you see? How do you feel? How do others around you feel? (What do you want your readers to experience? Keep this in mind as you write.) How will your reporting differ from the report of the engineer?
4. Play the original tape of the burning of the Hindenburg. What is it that the reporter makes us see, hear, feel?

*_Involuntary conversion_ in legal and business jargon means that an asset (say a plane or a building) can no longer serve in the accepted way. If a factory burns down, that's an involuntary conversion of an asset from its intended use. (with thanks to Scott Keech)

5. Nikos Kazantzakis's *Spain* describes the crash of a bomber during the Spanish Civil War:

> We could see blood all over the ground. And among the twisted shattered remnants, we made out a slimy shape—"the pilot,' cried the soldiers, as they started clearing away the pieces of iron and machinery and broken wings. In spite of longing to get away, I forced myself to stay there; to watch; not to lose a single drop of the horror. A stretcher arrived. The soldiers bent over and handful by handful, scooped the human pulp onto the stretcher.

What does this passage make us see, hear, touch, feel? Does this passage force us to use any of our other senses?

6. Why can't the men and women who write the stockholder's report for National Airlines say the crash of a 727, not the involuntary conversion of a 727?

I believe most kids can write a blistering paragraph on the last question, or, and this is a distinct possibility, a peculiar defense of this kind of language (e.g., "What's wrong with hiding the facts?).

But something has happened. The class is beginning to understand euphemism and metaphor. They can't help themselves.

WHY MUST EUPHEMISM AVOID METAPHOR?

Now I want the class to explore with me the kind of language euphemism uses. A game helps. We have several lists from which to work. Let's take five to six easy terms, easy because the kids have heard them on TV or in the market or even in class:

1. sanitary engineer
2. midriff bulge
3. memory garden
4. overindulgence
5. verbalize

Can we make a generalization yet? Well, we see nouns in four out of five and an "ize" attached to an adjective-noun "verbal." The nouns appear to be accompanied by adjectives. Let's try another five:

1. effectuate an activity
2. severe norm violation
3. selected out
4. visually handicapped
5. liberate

Does the same principle emerge: a noun modified by another word, a newly constructed verb—a root here, a suffix there? Suppose we have a new list before us:

I.		II.
1. air support	(1-e)	a. a classroom
2. containment	(2-j)	b. a waterbed
3. functional retardates	(3-d)	c. cost or costs
4. structured situation	(4-a)	d. kids who fail a subject
5. dichotomize	(5-i)	e. bombing
6. disadvantaged	(6-f)	f. poor or ignorant
7. readjustment center	(7-g)	g. a prison
8. expenditure	(8-c)	h. a slum
9. substandard housing	(9-h)	i. to divide
10. flotation system	(10-b)	j. concealing information

What is it about the language of Column I as opposed to Column II that bothers us? In every case a simple noun or verb in Column II gets blown up in Column I. Sometimes the word gets blown up twice. A blown-up noun "housing" gets more air pumped into it when "substandard" accompanies it. All this air. What purpose does it serve? Quite the opposite of the metaphor. And yet behind the euphemism, there is often an attempt to use metaphor. To say that something is something else or like something else is to make comparisons. It is to examine two different objects or ideas in order to see with wonder that they have lines, texture, smell or feeling in common. The euphemism is the product of looking and then looking away. Even when it consciously looks for metaphor as in "memory garden" for cemetery, it is not looking for meaning. At its best or most gentle, when it seeks to protect people from hurt, it often accepts a very palpitating fact, like cancer, an automobile accident, an airplane crash, a rape, a coffin—and then covers it or drapes it. The fact is itself vivid. The senses see, smell, taste, touch. The fact even overwhelms the senses, and people faint, especially if someone they love is in that crash, coffin, or diagnosis. But the euphemism looks away or overlooks. It does not abstract meaning. It hides it. That's almost what it's paid to do. Ask any mortician or the manufacturers of involuntary conversions.

Poets do not conceal death. They reveal it—by metaphor. They give us meaning as they themselves reach for truth.

Here is "I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died" by Emily Dickinson:

I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air—
Between the Heaves of Storm—

The Eyes around—had wrung them dry—
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset—when the King
Be witnessed—in the Room—

I willed my Keepsakes—Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable—and then it was
There interposed a Fly—

With Blue—uncertain stumbling Buzz
Between the light—and me—
And then the Windows failed—and then
I could not see to see—

Catch the keepers of memory gardens selling burial plots with "I Heard a Fly Buzz." It won't work; it won't sell.*

I Could Not See to See

I believe a good book predisposes toward morality. I believe that a good book or poem makes one want to be moral. Morality comes from affection, sympathy, and understanding. I want to teach euphemism, its use and abuse, but kids are not going to come up with euphemisms of their own. They don't want to dig yet. So I give them Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One*, and while I'm helping them explore satire, I ask them to keep a list of euphemisms. Then they look at Mitford's *The American Way of Death* in order to compare two different approaches to the funeral industry.

I send several volunteers to visit the local funeral establishments to do a saturation report. Man, do they return with euphemisms and blasphemy! I also invite, encourage a defense of the practices of our funeral industry—even invite a guest speaker.

After all is said and done, after a guest speaker has assured us that unpleasant realities have to be given "inexistence," that it is merciful to say "departed" rather than "dead," what must we do in return?

We don't have to tell off our guest, for if a representative of the funeral industry does come to call, we will write him a polite thank-you note. He has taught us a lesson about business ethics and language; and with new appreciation, we can now return to the metaphor and Emily Dickinson's "I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died" to see how a poet trips up death, not by selling us a bill of goods and a pile of coffins, but rather by taking us by the hand and giving us meaning.

Poets try not to use a metaphor, simile or other figures of speech which they are used to seeing in print. The trick is to have something to say, not something to hide. For to hide you must turn to euphemism.

*Teachers may wish to explore with students other ways poets have used metaphor rather than eupehmism to treat death honestly. Some suggestions are "Death Be Not Proud" by John Donne, "The Last Night That She Lived" by Emily Dickinson, "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London" by Dylan Thomas, "Buffalo Bill's defunct" by e. e. cummings, "Little Elegy" by X. J. Kennedy, and "The Death of the Ball Turrett Gunner" by Randall Jarrell.

WE DESTROYED A VILLAGE IN ORDER TO SAVE IT

The Viet Nam War sought to defend the indefensible. Euphemism was rampant in the prose of the Pentagon and the military. Here is an exercise which could follow some of the photos which came out of this war: the napalmed girl fleeing, the father holding a shrapneled child in his arms:

A		B
1. the war in Viet Nam	(1-h)	a. resources control
2. to spill more blood by continuing a war	(2-g)	b. defoliation
3. the total destruction of a city by an atom bomb	(3-i)	c. a cloud
4. the total destruction of another city in retaliation for the first	(4-j)	d. K.I.A.
5. to refrain from using atom bombs	(5-l)	e. to expend ordinance
6. a force of rockets aimed at rockets and bombers of the enemy	(6-k)	f. undertake interdiction
7. to drop a bomb	(7-e)	g. to escalate
8. shot to death by an enemy	(8-d)	h. advisory intervention
9. to fire a shell	(9-f)	i. taking out a city
10. radioactive fallout	(10-c)	j. exchange of populations
11. crop poisoning	(11-a)	k. counter-force
12. destruction of vegetation	(12-b)	l. controlled response
13. uprooting a village	(13-m)	m. population resettlement
14. to execute unofficially	(14-n)	n. to terminate with extreme prejudice
15. to kill one of your own men with a grenade	(15-o)	o. to frag
16. to kill in batches	(16-p)	p. to waste
17. a bombing attack on the enemy	(17-q)	q. an advance retaliatory protective mission

Even teachers can have trouble with this matching exercise. The war in Viet Nam is now history, but the difficulty with performing this matching question is that the language in Column B is so unspecific. Charles McCabe of *The San Francisco Chronicle* uses adjectives like "emollient" to described these terms. He quotes Cardinal Newman, who said, "Mistiness is the mother of safety." But it is Orwell who tells us what is happening. In almost all of Column B, the words, many of them Latin, "fall upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details." What we have is euphemism, and euphemism often makes its point or dulls its point by a novel use of cliché.

Some discussion questions for paragraphs or papers should follow this exercise.

1. *To waste* means to kill in batches. Is *to waste* really a euphemism? Define euphemism carefully before you take on this question.
2. When Lieutenant William J. Calley described the My Lai massacre, he spoke of "wasting people." Think of the verb "to waste." Write several sentences in which you use this verb, e.g. "I wasted my time yesterday." Now think of *waste* as a noun, as an adjective. What pictures come to mind. Is "to waste" a good metaphor for killing people in batches? Why? Why not?
3. *Defoliation*—metaphor, euphemism or both?
4. Charles McCabe of *The San Francisco Chronicle* calls the language of the Viet Nam War "Pentagonese." And he never tires of saying that Pentagonese is "language that defends the indefensible." Review the above list. How does McCabe's statement (he's quoting George Orwell) apply to the above list?

RATS, BATS, AND BUDS

Orwell, in his analysis of what made writing in his time "unavoidably" ugly, explains that when a writer can't say what he wants to say, he becomes "...almost indifferent to whether his words mean anything or not." Orwell says, "Quite apart from 'avoidable' ugliness, two qualities are common to them all [he has just given us five pieces of prose]: staleness of imagery and...lack of precision." Under staleness of imagery, he discusses the dying metaphor, the dead metaphor, and a "huge dump of worn-out metaphors which have lost all evocative power and are merely used because they save people the trouble of inventing phrases for themselves...and incompatible metaphors...frequently mixed, a sure sign that the writer is not interested in what he is saying." Some metaphors, Orwell insists, are twisted out of their original meaning: "toe the line," sometimes written "*tow* the line."

The distinctions that Orwell makes between the dead and the dying metaphor, the dying and the twisted are wonderfully funny, but the metaphor of Watergate wasn't funny. It was sick. But how do we get young people to appreciate this sort of illness when they see it? Here is an exercise whose substance I am borrowing from a piece which Dick Meister, then labor correspondent for *The San Francisco Chronicle*, wrote several years ago.

1. to keep your ear to the grindstone
2. to get a toe hold in the public eye
3. to hitch up our troubles and throw down our gauntlets
4. to have plans underfoot
5. to go down the drain in a steamroller
6. to be sold down the drain
7. to get a country out of the eight ball
8. to take a flying gambit*
9. to deal with the whole gambit of an affair**
10. to get our dandruff up
11. to smell a rat and nip it in the bud
12. to go off the deep end of a reservation
13. to take a bear by the horns
14. to grasp a nettle by the horns
15. to find too many cooks in the soup
16. to visit every cranny and crook in the district

Number 16 may be a genuine slip of the tongue, but the tendency throughout is malapropism, not because someone is showing off his ignorance but because someone doesn't really give a damn. He's on the road to Duckspeak,*** and he's taking us with him.

What does the teacher do with Meister's list? The teacher lets the class play *Mad* magazine. Everybody draws or tries to draw a picture of his favorite stunt: How does one "go down the drain in a steamroller?" How does one "deal with," or better, "deal a whole gambit?" What the teacher wants to do is get the kids to see how ridiculous the picture, the image is. The imagery is not stale; it's ridiculous. The aim of metaphor is to make someone else see what you see, hear what you hear. When pictures clash or smash or have no real relationship to one another, like "going off the deep end of a reservation," then it means that the writer isn't really looking, thinking, or feeling. He's just blabbing.

Try pictures of these:
1. to deep-six papers
2. a White-House Horror Story
3. to ventilate the structure of campaigning
4. to develop (additional) information
5. to gather together to compare ignorances
6. to test the chronology of one's knowledge (or somebody else's knowledge)
7. to sign off on a proposal

*There's gambit in chess. There's gamble as in game of chance. And there's gambol as in caper—goats do it.

**Then there's gamut, which is an exercise in itself.

***Duckspeak, see George Orwell's *1984*.

8. to follow a channel of reporting
9. to be brought up to speed on events
10. to deal with people telephonically
11. a zero defect system

Richard Gambino's "Watergate Lingo" makes my job easy. His supply of what he calls "martyred" metaphor is inexhaustible. But now we ask the class to draw pictures of the items in the second list. This time it isn't so easy. The teacher can remind the class that Watergate happened only yesterday, but we bury the past so quickly the teacher will have to recount the story of Watergate or have the class read Woodward and Bernstein. And even after the kids know what happened to Nixon and what almost happened to the country, drawing a picture of most of the eleven items is going to be difficult. In the first exercise, the pictures are cockeyed, but kids can draw them. In the second exercise the task is almost impossible. I suppose we can draw someone "deep-sixing papers" or "dealing with people telephonically," but the visual image is fading fast. Gambino calls Watergate lingo "a language of non-responsibility." It's not the inadvertent slip, or a meaning which the writer or a speaker cannot express. The language of Watergate comes closer to Orwell's statement that "a writer is almost indifferent as to whether his words mean anything or not." Men like Erlichman, Haldeman, Dean, Mitchell were trying to make their guilt, their responsibility, go away. John Kenneth Galbraith in "The Age of Wordfact" explains precisely what is happening: "The wordfact makes words a precise substitute for reality. This is an enormous convenience. It means that to say something exists is a substitute for its existence. And to say that something will happen is as good as having it happen. . ."

I said earlier that language and action have deep roots. Says Galbraith, "Where once it was said of a statesman that he suited action to the words, now he suits the words to the actions." Except that these words are no longer words. They are quacks. A "point in time" is a quack. "Pre-situation" and "post-situation"* are more quacks but they didn't come out of ducks. They came out of—well, what kind of men were those who spoke the language of Watergate? How come they were so lacking in conscience? It isn't that they were mindless. The language wasn't washed out of their brains, just bleached until there was almost no color. Something else. They couldn't lie the way they did without some instruction. Their jargon is not only the jargon of spy movies and melodrama, but the jargon of the American market place and the jargon of the impossible dream. And perhaps the jargon of men who believe that all pigs are equal but some pigs are more equal....

*Pre-situation and post-situation are two more points in time.

Never Use a Long Word

The second Canadian is the exercise that tells us *Never to use a long word where a short one will do.* But you like long words. So do I. So let's modify this rule. We select long words if these words will make the person who has to read our work or hear our talk see what we see, feel what we feel—sensuous words. Sensuous words? The Nazis used sensuous words! Jews and also Russians and Poles were "two-legged lice, putrid vermin—like roaches on a dirty wall." I am borrowing from George Steiner's "The Hollow Miracle." People can lie sensuously and use short words. But we are talking about choices. We protest that we like long words. We like their sound and their music. Why should we squelch them in the name of Orwell? We mustn't! But there are exercises to explain the necessity for that rule. The kids have to see the blown-up style. They even have to yell in pain, "Cut it out!" "Say it in five!" "What bull!" Here is some bull:

1. The choice of exogenous variables in relation to multicolinearity is contingent upon the derivations of certain multiple correlation coefficients. (A paper by a college senior, from James P. Degnan, "Masters of Babble," *College English)*
2. Accidental death benefits will not be payable if death is caused by or contributed to by infirmity of mind or body or any illness or disease other than a bacterial infection occurring in consequence of an accidental injury on the exterior of the body. (From a life insurance policy—quoted by Milton Moskovitz, in "Plain English Insurance," *San Francisco Chronicle)*
3. Even in the most quantitative subjects, there is some error or at least a lack of reproducibility in the termination of scores on any one examination; in subject areas in which more subjective determinations are made, this lack of reproducibility is exacerbated. (A letter from a college administrator, *U.S. News & World Report)*
4. Well, I have always thought that if a political institution or committee enacted the role of an eleemosynary, it would, like the Pharisee, brag about it on all opportunities, and so you agreed with me that a doubing Thomas might think that this money was routed in the clandestine way not only to keep it secret but also to keep (secret) those people that were receiving the money. (Sam Ervin on laundered money from a Charles McCabe article titled, "Hot Air," *The San Francisco Chronicle)*
5. The goal of the exchange is to address stereotyping and prejudice that is still prevalent in our society by offering a mechanism for

your young people to experience a different world view than their own. (From an ad by the National Student Exchange)

6. Such preparations shall be made as will completely obscure all Federal buildings and non-federal buildings occupied by the Federal government during an air-raid for any period of time from visibility by reason of internal or external illumination. (A public administration order, quoted in Geoffrey Wagner's "The Language of Politics")
7. The rejection is particularly unfortunate because of the governor's personal concern with this grant, that I must report our review of your preapplication indicates the program described in that document does not meet the minimum requirements established by the legislation. (From an article by McCabe entitled "Cuttlefish Prose")
8. There came a time when there was a feeling, that at least, on my part, based on what Mr. Dean was telling me about the unravelling of this thing, that Mr. Magruder may have had some involvement and that culminated in a meeting with Attorney General at the end of July on the 31st of July, where Magruder was specifically discussed. (From "The Watergate Hearings," *Newsweek)*

What shall we do with these eight examples of inflated prose? First, we ask the class to count the number of "big" words in each passage. This counting is important. (You'll see why shortly.) Using the dictionary as a friend, we see whether it is possible to reduce the passage: Can we say what the paragraph says in one sentence. Let's try. The answers follow:

1. Supply determines demand.
2. No death benefits unless you die from an infection following the accident.
3. Even in subjects like math it is hard to predict test scores, or it is hard to predict how teachers will grade, or it is hard to predict whether a student who does well on one test will do well in another; in subjects like English, the job becomes impossible.
4. I always believed that if politicians depended on charity, they would brag about their virtuous poverty, and you agreed that this money was hidden so that these crooks could look good.
5. We want to fight stereotypes by getting kids to exchange homes.
6. Just tell people to pull down their shades during an air raid.
7. I'm sorry that we have to refuse you, governor, but the program you want does not meet our requirements.
8. Magruder was one of us.

There may be other interpretations of these eight pieces and, therefore, other short cuts. The point we should be making is that the long words in these passages serve no purpose except to fog up meaning. It doesn't mean that the long words are criminals. Words like "derivation," "infirmity," "exacerbate" are great words—if people use them with care and respect. And the teacher can, at this point, present the class with his own favorite prose passages—from Milton, Swift, Mill, or from Tocqueville. What we want to make clear from these eight (you can add more—the Watergate tapes, legal contracts, campaign speeches) is what language sounds like when people hide what they want to say or don't really know what they want to say. Long words make better cloaks. But a short word can lie too.

Another exercise that should follow:

> Arrange these eight passages in descending order—which is the biggest bit of bull? And the next. And the next. Which has the least bull? (This exercise is particularly interesting because although number eight has very few big words, it can easily go at the top of the list. Why? What it has to hide is so obvious. But item eight uses other tricks, tricks that Orwell speaks of, and so shall we.)

A WORD CAN BE A PIG

We are still on Orwell's second principle, preferring the short word to the long. Once more we want to stress intention. When we ask the kids to become conscious of their own language, we are asking them to become conscious of meaning. Deciding whether to use short or long words presents other problems, despite Orwell's very last rule that we throw out all of his rules, if in order to observe any one of them we have to say or write something "outright barbarous."

Here's the second problem. Consider this list, which I borrow from Cynthia H. Enloe and Mostafa Rejai.

The New Vocabulary	*The Old Vocabulary*
1. Political System	1. Country
2. Stability	2. Peace
3. Levels of Violence	3. War
4. Conflict	4. Hatred
5. Dysfunction	5. Tension
6. Development	6. Progress
7. Interaction	7. Diplomacy
8. Decision-makers	8. Statesmen
9. Variables	9. Events
10. Input	10. Information

If we examine the list, the new versus the old, we see that the longer, more abstract term is not necessarily a way of "fogging up" the old. Item 1: "a political system" does mean "country," but it means more than country. A political system takes in country and, on the surface, appears to be obscuring country, but if we ask ourselves what a political system really means, we can't say, "It means nothing; it's just a euphemism for country." The authors say that the new words "symbolize new perceptions of the world."* Let us consider for a moment "decision-maker" versus "statesman." The statesman, by his "discrete choices," his very personality, is the crucial factor in shaping the course of international affairs, say the authors. The decision-maker is a systems analyst, one who is "unawed by, and less optimistic about, policy-by-statesmanship... The systems analyst understands the numerous factors over which statesmen have only marginal control." I have not suggested a specific exercise with this list. I leave it to the teacher to decide, depending on the class.

So, we have to be wary of calling all long words phony. I may, for example, hate the word "interaction" because I have heard it used so often to cover up "dialogues" where the parties concerned or the "concerned parties" really don't give a darn what the other party is saying or feeling. Interaction is another name for "everyone doing his own thing." But interaction versus diplomacy is something else. If we come to understand interaction only as a meaningless label, and a systems analyst as a guy who is unemotional, calculating, even inhuman, then we can't begin to think of a dialogue with him. We just want to blow his brains out... which leads me to the language of violence.

The language of violence is full of short, offensive, Anglo-Saxon words. They hit us right in the "kisser" and cause us to bleed. Sticks and stones can break our bones, and so can words.

If we call a man, woman, or child a "gook," a "dink," or "vermin" (as the Nazis loved to call the Jews), we remove the human being. We can "waste" a gook or a dink and certainly "gas" vermin. So the new verbs "to waste" or "to frag" are a peculiar kind of euphemism. They're not long words, and they don't make pretty what is ugly. They are not like "selective ordinance" for napalm or "mechanical ambush" for booby-trap. If we exterminate vermin, we are doing what comes naturally. If we kill a pig, it's not murder. If an officer gets fragged, it's because he didn't get the message, that he's a pig, and pigs get the full treatment. You see?

The point is that if we use language to make abstractions of people, we can do it with a short word as well as a long. The idea of the euphemism is to turn us away from reality for a while. Murder is homicide, and there's

*Their article, "The New Style in U.S. Foreign Policy," first published in *Worldview*, 1970, I recommend to anyone who loves easy rules and snappy generalizations about language.

still a man in homicide, if we care to remember, but there are no people in "selective ordinance" or in "mechanical ambushes" or "pigs" or "vermin." So people become things, and less than things, and our own flesh and blood become pigs, no matter their color. And it's easy, it's even right, to stick a pig, kill him.

What do we do about Orwell's second rule or exercise? We change it. "Don't use a long word to hide a short word. Don't use a short word to make a human being a 'no' thing. Don't use a short word or a long word to tell a lie, not to yourself, not to others."

More Short Words

A TV drama *Born Innocent* had an explicit rape scene. One could make a good case for *Born Innocent* as social commentary or social document, but NBC could have moved the show to eleven PM and deleted the rape scene. NBC was greedy. Whatever would elevate their rating came first. That there might be a few sick people out there who would learn the wrong lesson was a possibility, but freedom of expression and the first amendment were at stake—and NBC got itself a winner. A nine-year-old girl was raped by kids who were imitating the rape scene.

We heard very little about the four young people who raped the girl. Were they too young to understand what they did? Were they too much victims of society? Did they have the right to make other victims? At what point does compassion begin in a child, and when does it cease to exist? NBC said that the rapists, or at least one of the rapists, didn't see the actual rape scene. He was in the bathroom. His mother told him what had happened. Fascinating—but what did the four make of the nine-year-old before raping her? They had to make her less than human, didn't they? They had to make her a thing, a pig, less than a pig. Was it that others had made them less than nothing? One wonders about the language of their defense. One wonders how these kids can begin to defend themselves, what language they will use, short or long? And their lawyers?

Can we talk about these question in our classrooms?

And write about them, because if we write we have to think?

I think we must. For when we want to destroy people, as the Nazis did, we have to make them nameless. This we do by "gook," "dink," "nigger," "Jew," "whitey." What did the four who raped the nine-year-old girl call her? There must have been some tag or label. The long word disguises, clouds up the indefensible. The short word defends. To call a man a pig makes it easy to frag him. To call a little girl—what?—makes it easy to rape her.

From Violence to Watergate

Excerpts from the President's Memoir of March 21, 1972 *(Newsweek,* July 22, 1974)

1. As I examined him [John Dean] it, uh, seems that he feels, even he would be guilty of some, uh, criminal liability, due to the fact that he, uh, participated in the actions, which, uh, resulted in taking care of the defendants, while they were, uh, under trial. Uh, as he pointed out, uh, what is causing him concern is that every one of the various participants is now getting his own counsel and that this is going to cause considerable problems because it will be each man for himself, and, uh, one will not be afraid to rat on the other.

Also from the memoirs of March 21:

2. I feel for all of the people involved here, because they were all, as I pointed out to them in the meeting in the E.O.B. this afternoon, involved for the very best motives. Uh, I don't think that, uh, certainly Haldeman or Ehrlichman had any idea about bugging, I, I and of course know Dean didn't. He in fact pointed out that when, uh, Liddy had first presented this scheme, it was so wild that Mitchell sat puffing his pipe rather chuck—or rather, uh, chuckling all the while.

These two excerpts are from a dictating machine. When people talk into a machine, they are a little more self-conscious than they would be in ordinary conversation. In a way, talking into a machine is like writing. It's the first step for some people. It may have been the fourth or fourteenth step for Nixon. Even if we remove all the "uhs," the memoir of March 21 sounds strangulated and terribly careful. But what's Nixon saying? Let's try this exercise:

> We take a red pencil and cross out all the words we don't need. We go through this procedure several times. The first time, it seems we need almost every word with the exception of the "uhs." Then we discover that we can reduce the first two lines to "John Dean is afraid." The next two lines—"John Dean is afraid that he committed a crime." The next two lines—"He tried to bribe the defendants while they were on trial." The next two—"Each defendant now has a lawyer." And, finally, "It's every man for himself."

I cannot swear that kids who don't have the background to Watergate will be able to reduce Ehrlichman's, Nixon's, Haldeman's, Dean's and Mitchell's Watergate prose, but if the teacher supplies the class with

examples of t[illegible]ir own prose, either in conference time, or in ditto where the prose pass[illegible]es are, of course, anonymous, then the kids will get the idea: *If it is p[illegible]ible to cut a word out, cut it out* (Orwell's third rule). And if the cry comes: "But then I'll have nothing to say," let the teacher congratulate the kid who has cried out so honestly. Or should the cry ring clear: "But we have to soften the blow sometimes," let the reply be: "By how many layers?"

It isn't the scalpel that cuts tendon and muscle along with the fat. That's not what we want kids to be doing in their own writing and in the speech and the writing of others. It's the language that covers up, that denies, that cheats, that hides, or that simply has nothing to say. Why should they stoop so low?

As teachers of composition, we won't be using this sort of exercise with kids who are first struggling to put anything down on paper. But with high school seniors, freshmen or sophomores in college, hearing and seeing the language of Watergate may be a sobering experience. First of all, the language is so obviously full of bull, that even if we can't reduce it, we know it says nothing. Second, the crooks got caught. Yes, they are writing their memoirs; only this time they won't have so much to hide. No doubt, they will turn to euphemism. In Watergate they relied on chicken-coop constructions, lots of phrases attached to conjunctions and no guts. And the passive voice. We are approaching the passive voice. But but before we do, the Watergate prose has another enchantment for us.

The Malaprop-Metaphor

Try to draw a picture of the following. *One* item will do.

1. to basically hunker down
2. to anticipate something hitting the fan
3. to tough it through
4. to sight minefields down the road
5. to play hard ball
6. to stroke an associate
7. a cycling situation
8. a ballplayer who carried tremendous water
9. a point in time
10. a time frame
11. to labor a point
12. to go the hang-out road
13. to get off the cover-up line
14. a modified, limited hangout*

What can follow from this exercise are several pictures which we will probably have to label obscene—like being goosed by an ox"** or stroked

*These examples are from Edwin Newman's *Strictly Speaking.*
**goosed by an ox from *gored by an ox*

by an associate. The purpose of this exercise is to make kids aware of how the President's men thought when they were trying hard not to think. Propose this scheme to your class:

> Someone says—your teacher, your minister, your social worker—"Look, you have to take the bull by the horns." You're not a farmer; you're city people, but what do you suppose that picture means? Under what conditions would you have to grab a bull by the horns? Even if you're not certain, you do see a picture. And the picture spells what: You're in some kind of _____. (danger, trouble, predicament, dilemma)

Analyzing "to grab a bull by the horns" is difficult. Why? To grab a bull by the horns is a worn-out metaphor, like "grist to the mill," "Achilles' heel," "swan song," "hotbed." They have lost all "evocative power" because people no longer understand where the original picture came from, and so they will use "swan song" any time they think it sound good. Orwell's example is, "The Fascist octopus has sung its swan song." And here we have a lovely, mixed-up picture of an octopus singing a song, a swan song. I suppose the melody floats out of the octopus in the shape of a swan. But one sees a picture, crazy though it is. And one can also see someone attempting to grab a bull by the horns. But what does it mean "to hunker down," basically or not? And what is a "point in time?" A point in time is a metaphor for what? For a dot? For a dot-dash? Dean is trying very hard to appear precise.

I can draw a time frame, or someone stroking an associate, or a cycling situation, or people playing hard ball, and kids can explain why these pictures are cockeyed. They can also begin to see that the people who used these words weren't thinking, didn't want to think, didn't want people to see what they saw, but often the cockeyed language exposed them. It's as if they sensed how dirty they were. These people were also addicted to another device by which they could hide themselves, the passive voice. The passive voice is often a hint to us and to others that we are hiding.

Don't Use the Passive Passively

Orwell's fourth rule is easier to preach than it is to practice, for it takes vigilance to follow that rule: *Never use the passive voice where you can use the active.* Even for an experienced writer, the rule is sticky. For example, you want to tell someone who is down in the dumps that he should value himself more highly than he does. Do you say, "But people do respect you, Mr. Robinson." Or do you say, "But you are respected, Mr. Robinson. You are respected by everyone who has ever met you." The passive voice makes the subject the receiver of the action, not the doer, and in this instance Mr. Robinson should receive the respect just as much as people should give it. I think we have a choice here. *Never use the passive voice when you can use the active* is a splendid rule, but we will need to qualify it. Before we do, we must first make certain that our kids know the difference between the active voice and the passive voice—and give them practice recognizing the difference. In the practice exercises, they can begin to see those instances where they can use the passive voice comfortably. The key question, I think, is Orwell's last rule. Does using the passive voice make the sentence barbarous? If a student can argue that the subject of his sentence really should receive the action, that he is not hiding the subject under a blanket of fluff, then he can and should use the passive voice.

1. English is widely spoken in Spain.
2. The Reich is shown plunging to bloody chaos. (George Steiner)
3. *Mother Courage* was first produced in Zurich in 1941. (Steiner)
4. A number were killed in concentration camps. (Steiner)
5. It will be seen that I have not made a full translation. (George Orwell)
6. Where it is not true, it will be generally found that the writer is some kind of rebel. (Orwell)
7. Things like...the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan can indeed be defended. (Orwell)
8. Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air. (Orwell)
9. What is needed is to let the meaning choose the word, not the other way about. (Orwell)

With the exception of the first sentence, I have chosen all the examples from my two favorite essayists. What do I propose to do with these sentences? I propose to remind myself that even the gods use the passive voice. And after: I want my class to have some command of the difference between the active and the passive voice. I ask the class, for example, to put the above sentences into the active voice. I ask them to make a

choice. Is it more effective to say, "The author shows the Reich to be plunging into bloody chaos," or "Mann shows the Reich to be plunging into bloody chaos?" Is it more effective to say, "Nations bomb defenseless villages from the air?" I think we have a choice here.

When can we admit of no choice?

"When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims," says Orwell.

When there is a gap between what we know and what we want people to think we know.

When an assignment calls for research or thought, and we are ready to do neither.

When we have to make an impression, a false one.

When we have to lie.

I say *we*. By *we* I include teachers. But the kids, in their writing, have to make the choice. They have to admit that they are bluffing, that the passive voice helps them to bluff, helps them to fill up empty space; and the passive voice, when they use it insincerely, is the greatest giveaway that they are padding or evading. The story goes that a public official got sick of a piece of bureaucratic prose. He told the pundit who wrote it to make the passage readable—and the reply was something like, "Oh, yeh, you want to laymanize it."

How can we make such characters sensitive to their sticky prose? By giving them enough of their own packing as examples of what they shouldn't be doing. Ditto by the dozens the passages which classmates have composed and ask the class to decide:

1. Whether a given passage strikes them as sincere.
2. How often the passive voice is used.
3. What would happen to the passage if the passive voice were changed to the active voice? Would the passage remain intact or would it shrivel up and die?

We can't prepare these dittos, alas, without reading papers ourselves. I have several exercises to share with you, but your best exercises will come from what you and the kids compose. Remember that the kids will understand choices if the assignment is fresh. And remember too that passive voice is a symptom of a greater disease. The disease is what Orwell calls "the inflated style. The inflated style is itself a kind of euphemism." Really, it's again euphemism we are after.

Here are some exercises:

> You are a teacher who has been asked by your principal to prepare a profile for your students rather than a grade. The profile will be sent to the parents. Translate the following profile by concentrating only on the voice. Whenever you see the passive voice, make it active.

I.

Jimmy's tasks are accomplished when his interest is sufficiently stimulated by the teacher, but assistance is required when rules and standards of fair play need to be adhered to. Quieter habits of communication as well as learning to respect the rights of others are not yet being developed in sufficient quantity so that lasting friendships are being formed. Winning a point is usually accomplished by physical means. Nonetheless, it is hoped that improvement will be seen in the not-too-distant future.

A translation of above:

Jimmy works when the teacher helps him (or when the teacher sits on him). Otherwise, he's a pain in the ass. He beats up on other kids. Nobody likes him. All we can do is pray.

II.

1. You have translated these sentences into English by concentrating first on the passive voice. What else is wrong with the language of this profile?
2. What has happened to Jimmy?

III.

Try translating these sentences. Examine the voice. Make a choice.

1. An extension of time is needed in order to evaluate and make a judgment in terms of a response.
2. Kidnappings have been suffered by three families in recent weeks and their bereavement is much felt by the community.
3. The suspect was approached by the police officers, and it was indicated to him that his presence had been observed in the neighborhood at various and sundry odd hours and various phone calls were received in the nature of complaints.
4. The discussion was carried on by the three men by whom it was undertaken to come to a decision about the matter in question.
5. Various prosecutors were approached by you and were asked for immunity from prosecution, testimony-wise? (See if you can unscramble this one.)
6. Let those engaged in the cover-up be brought forward and be persuaded to be held legally accountable.
7. I think it is well understood that the President has the constitutional power to prevent the betrayal of national security secrets as I understand he does and that is well understood by the American people, and an episode like that is seen in that context, there shouldn't be any problem.

8. Once the form has been properly perused by the said candidate, the application will be filled out in triplicate and placed at the appropriate station, and the applicant will be seated in subsequent order and called upon in due process.
9. In regard to your recent inquiry, your question has been sent to the department of restitution where it will be given its share of appropriate attention.
10. No practice in Washington is more beloved than that of attributing statements to sources who cannot be named.

Two of these sentences are authentic; I have borrowed them directly from the speaker. One of these is a perfectly good English sentence. And one is a disaster. But first, try to put these sentences into the active voice. Once you begin to use the active voice, other things will follow. You will want to simplify the sentence in other ways. Words will begin to sound "phony." You will begin to see padding that you didn't see before. But the reconstruction begins with the passive voice. In every single instance, except one, the passive voice serves to hide, to cloud an issue or to make a simple job look very important and more complicated than it really is.

(Number ten is Edwin Newman's from *Strictly Speaking*. Number seven, which I borrowed from Gambino's "Watergate Lingo," is from John Ehrlichman's testimony.)

Number ten is, of course, the good sentence; number seven is the disaster. Let me restate Orwell's rule about the passive voice:

1. Never use the passive voice where you can use the active unless you feel that the subject *should* receive the action in a particular sentence. Then guard against bogging down the sentence with too many phrases.
2. Never use the passive voice because you don't really know who or what the subject is.
3. Never use the passive voice to cover up, like a blanket, your other words, your real thought. Once again, look out for too many phrases.
4. Do use the passive voice consciously to create or establish mood and satire.
5. Be conscious of voice. It's really the first step in editing a paper.

32

Plain Talk

We are ready for Orwell's fifth rule: *Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word, if you can use the everyday equivalent.* In the essay "Politics and the English Language," Orwell was able to isolate under the heading "Pretentious Diction" words "that give an air of scientific impartiality to biased judgments...words like phenomenon, categorical, constitute, eliminate." But do we think of these words as pretentious anymore? Adjectives like "epoch-making, epic, historic, unforgettable, triumphant, age-old, inevitable, inexorable, veritable"—words which Orwell insisted "dignified the sordid processes of international politics"—now dignify the sale of shampoo, automobiles, wine. Orwell says words like "plastic, natural, vital, human, dead, sentimental" occur mostly in art criticism and make a passage meaningless, but with the exception of sentimental and plastic, which I insist need careful definition, I let the other words pass. Foreign words and expressions such as *cul de sac, ançien régime, deus ex machina, mutatis mutandis, status quo, Gleichschaltung, Weltanschauung,* I find so seldom *(status quo* excepted), that when they do occur, it's rather a sign of intellectual curiosity, and I'm delighted. But jargon words peculiar to political writing, words like *petty bourgeois, realistic, socialism, freedom, justice, class, totalitarian, progressive, reactionary, equality,* even *science* are words I still find used in the manner Orwell described, "to mean something desirable or undesirable," depending upon who the speaker or the audience is. Orwell says that these words are often used in a "consciously dishonest way... That is, the person who uses them has his own private definition but allows his hearers to think he means something quite different." I think myself that people use these words today not because they have a definition of their own which they are consciously hiding, but because these words have such sacred and powerful connotations that the speaker really doesn't want "to be tied down to any one meaning," for then he might have to stop using the word.

Concerning Orwell's fifth rule, the problem as I see it today is not the foreign word as much as it is the jargon word and the scientific word, which is a type of jargon.

Exercise I

a. lifestyle
b. input
c. pluralism
d. elitist
e. core-curriculum
f. creativity
g. charisma
h. irrelevant
i. ethnic
j. folklorist
k. terrorist
l. activist

m. at that point in time
n. hopefully
o. capability, negative, positive, or limited
p. potentialize
q. thrust, as in the thrust of an argument
r. to expertize
s. to surface
t. alleged, as in alleged shoot-out
u. attitudinalize

Exercise II

1. selective presentation
2. to explore options
3. to parse a situation
4. to focus on a situation
5. to give perspective to an argument, arrangement or situation
6. to effect a relationship
7. to shape a dialogue
8. to ventilate an argument
9. dynamic growth
10. an accelerated rate

The words in Exercises I and II fit the term *jargon*. They are words which we hear all the time or see all the time, but they are not really ours. Do we know what those words and phrases really mean? Let's see.

Practice 1. Take the first five words in Exercise I. Define each word. Don't go to a dictionary. What do *you* think the word means?

Practice 2. The teacher has prepared a ditto sheet in which she lists all the different meanings that have come across her desk for the five words she has assigned. Is there agreement on all five?

Practice 3. Now go to a dictionary. How does a dictionary define these words? Are you having trouble finding the words in the dictionary? Why? If a word does not appear in a dictionary, does that mean you can't use the word?

Practice 4. Now that you have reconsidered what the word means, use it in a good sentence. Don't say, "Pluralism is a funny word, but I like it." Try to define the word as you use it, or use the word in such a way that nobody can doubt what you mean by it.

Practice 5. Now do the same with the next five words.

Practice 6. What's the difference between an activist and a terrorist? Write the difference as you see it. Can a dictionary help you?

Practice 7. "To potentialize," "to expertize," "to climatize," "to charismarize..." can you make up a few of your own? Keep the list going! Stop at ten. Now go back and explain each verb. When you "expertize" something, what are you really doing? Are you coining a new

word by just pasting on an ending? What does the "ize" mean?

Practice 8. Use each of your "ize" verbs in an original sentence. What kind of sentences are you writing? See anything wrong with the sentences?

JARGON

The dictionary still defines *jargon* as "incoherent speech or gibberish," but few of us think of jargon as having its roots in gurgling or chattering the way birds do. Today we speak of the jargon of a particular profession. "That's lawyer's jargon" or "the jargon of sociology," we say. Whatever profession it belongs to, *jargon*, according to most dictionaries, is a "derogatory" term. Derogatory is an understatement. Those who have to read jargon and pass an exam based on what they read, fill out a form, or sign a document, feel more than passing contempt for the prose and the people who manufacture it. Often they feel helpless and angry, but many of our students accept jargon as a way of life and return it daily as a most effective way to communicate. Communicate what? My first impulse is to say "nothing," but some people do understand a particular kind of jargon, and some kids mistakenly believe that simple language is not big enough to convey the protest or the dreams that they carry around in their hearts, or the knowledge that they carry around in their heads. What is it we dislike about some jargon? First, when people use the jargon of a particular profession or school, they give themselves such airs. Everyone is a prophet on Mt. Olympus, provided he can speak the passwords. The language becomes so specialized that it requires initiation, two to four years of undergraduate immersion, and then one is a member of a secret and brilliant society and the rest of the world can go hang. There's something so infantile about this sort of pretension. If a sociologist can't understand the language of psycho-linguistics or vice versa, who's kidding whom? I suppose that the language of mathematics, physics, chemistry and engineering has its short cuts (which the serious student must learn), but real jargon is no short cut. And a good teacher of the sciences can always address a bunch of ordinary citizens and talk "plain." Jargon, even of the first kind, so often lacks thought or makes thought heavy. Original thought occurs in fairly simple prose, or even flashes, but if one is afraid not to use the jargon of the "in group"—it might suggest ignorance or disrespect—one begins to blanket his thinking with the appropriate vocabulary. In some cases, one quits thinking at all.

The second objection is that jargon takes up time and fills up space. In a world of paper shortages, who needs such waste?

Third, the sound of jargon is irritating, or nagging, in its super staccatto, so that we get the feeling we're being quacked at to buy this, believe that...the sort of quacking that Orwell describes as Duckspeak, except

that another variety, slightly more sonorous, is inflated Duck. The chief quackers have a false erudition. The very cacophony works by bullying, by hammering, by blabbing.

Fourth, jargon abstracts humanity. Yes, there is a speaker, but he usually speaks only to himself. If he speaks to others, he is manipulating them, doing something to them, not with them or for them. The speaker doesn't really care for his audience. He might as well be in his own space capsule.

Fifth, jargon often approaches insanity. The "involuntary conversion of a 727" is insane. But examine some other samples of business jargon, and you will see that things simply are not what they are, and people are no longer people. And the jargon of Watergate with its cloak and dagger vocabulary? And the war which has now become history? A U.S. Air Force colonel once got sore at the press because the press insisted we were "bombing" Cambodia. According to the colonel, we weren't "bombing." We were giving the people of Cambodia "air support." And in the earlier days of the war, we were "destroying villages in order to save them." In the last two instances, the language is fairly simple and direct, but the thinking has turned to gibberish. Accepting jargon or giving it in even small doses is dangerous. It affects the way we look at reality.

Here are some lively examples of modern jargon which I am taking from Edwin Newman's *Strictly Speaking*. In previous exercises I have made up my own; so can you, and so can the kids, once they recognize the technique.

Business Jargon

Says Newman: "Business puts enormous pressure on language...Under this pressure, triple and quadruple phrases come into being: 'high retention characteristics,' 'process knowledge rate development,' 'anti-dilutive common stock equivalents.' Under this pressure also, adjectives become adverbs; nouns become adjectives; prepositions disappear; compounds abound."

And then Newman offers some examples of business jargon. The first from the American Buildings Company:

> Improved long-span and architectural panel configuration which enhance appearance and improve weatherability.

From the Allegheny Power System:

> In the last analysis the former, or front-end, process seems the more desirable because the latter, or back-end process is likely to create its own environmental problems.

From Continental Hair Products, its annual report:

> Depreciation and amortization of property, plant and equipment are provided on the straight line and double acting declining balance methods at various rates calculated to extinguish the

book value of the respective assets over their estimated useful lives.

There's another from Continental Hair:

> Continental has exercised a dynamic posture by first establishing a professional marketing program and utilizing the base to penetrate multi-markets."

We begin to see that "the involuntary conversion of a 727" is nothing special.

Can we examine once more the jargon which Newman has given us? If we look at the characteristics which Newman has set out for us, I think we have to insist that the prepositional phrase is an important part of jargon; so is the infinitive and so is the gerund. Jargon loves phrases, the better to string things. More examples from Newman's *Strictly Speaking* will follow, where the phrase stringing will be quite obvious. What will also become obvious are those meaningless words with which jargon loves to gargle: "anti-dilutive equivalent," "weatherability," "panel configuration," "dynamic posture," "to penetrate multi-markets." What do these words mean? Orwell says that jargon is needed "if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them." In business jargon and even in some of our war jargon it isn't that we receive *no* pictures. Often we get some kind of picture: only the picture is crazy, cockeyed, mad. It's *Mad* magazine.

Here are a few more samples from Newman:

From a regional development report:

> It is thus probable...that highway development expenditures will conform de facto to the efficiency criterion and will have the greatest initial impact on the periphery of Appalachia where the most viable growth centers are located.

From Lee Rainwater, *On Understanding Poverty:*

> The social ontogeny of each generation recapitulates the social phylogeny of Negroes in the New World because the basic socio-economic position of the group has not changed in a direction favorable to successful achievement in terms of conventional norms.

The first report says very little. After reduction it goes something like this: "Money for highways will go where towns are growing." But the second says something. It's not twaddle. Nor can reduction give us the meaning, as much as translation or the application of Orwell's second and fifth rules. Rule Two: Never use a long word where a short word will do. Rule Five: Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday equivalent.

Let's apply number two and number five...Having trouble? Newman says it for us very well. "Each generation of American Negroes, like its predecessors, makes less money than whites."

38

Why Can't We Say What We Mean?

A review exercise:

a.	boundaries	(a-9)	1. indicators
b.	parts	(b-8)	2. conceptualization
c.	equal	(c-7)	3. traumatized
d.	signs	(d-1)	4. target areas
e.	causes	(e-6)	5. self-awareness
f.	communities to be studied	(f-4)	6. dependent variables
g.	to know oneself	(g-5)	7. co-equal
h.	thinking	(h-2)	8. components
i.	injured	(i-3)	9. parameters
j.	patterns	(j-10)	10. configurations

These matching questions might actually refresh those kids and teachers too who have forgotten that target areas are still places where people live and kids still have to go to school. In a target area, we have faculty-student ratios, and a reading score is something that goes in and out of a computer. What happened to the kids?

The purpose of this paper has been to examine the inflated style and to suggest ways to combat this style. There is no way as effective as the teaching and the reading of composition. But before composition, there must also be the teaching and the reading of other writers, especially the writers of the inflated style, those who use it consciously or unconsciously, and those who seek to expose this style. For our own students, when they fall into this style, we have to be conscious of their needs. Are they defending the indefensible, or trying to express the inexpressible? Are they trying to shield others or protect themselves from hurt?

What is important is that we should be looking for thought in language and helping that thought emerge. The inflated style is usually a sign that the student isn't thinking or that he's afraid to think. The question is why?

How much is the inflated style a sign of helplessness? What can we do as teachers? Going after the inflated style *is* the teaching of composition. Composition requires that we think about what we feel. Composition requires that we compose sentences from words, that we compose ourselves enough to be able to compose sentences. It means that we look for meaning. It means that we do not dodge meaning or run away from it. It means that we practice Orwell's exercises with some modifications and a few additions, the teacher as well as the student.

Here are the rules of the game:

1. Don't hide behind a word or lie behind a word.
2. Don't lie to others; you begin to believe your own lies.
3. Try to say what you mean. You have to think in order to do that.
4. Don't make something pretty if it's ugly or mean or cruel.
5. Don't make people pigs. You turn yourself into one.
6. Don't drag out a sentence because it sounds nice.
7. Remember that a metaphor is supposed to give life, not take life.
8. Remember the word euphemism. It covers a great many sins.
9. Never commit an involuntary conversion of a 727...not even for money, not even for power.
10. Don't quack at people.

Here are Orwell's rules:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short word will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use a passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

I am suggesting that we stretch these rules by only a fraction of an inch.

References

Caen, Herb. *The San Francisco Chronicle*, July 19, 1978.

Enloe, Cynthia H. and Rejai, Mostafa. "The New Style in U.S. Foreign Policy." In *Word Politics*. Edited by Max Skidmore. Palo Alto: James E. Freel and Associates, Inc., 1972.

Galbraith, John Kenneth. "The Age of Wordfact." In *Word Politics*. Edited by Max Skidmore. Palo Alto: James E. Freel and Associates, Inc., 1972.

Gambino, Richard. "Watergate Lingo." In *Doublespeak: Language For Sale*. Edited by William Sparke and Beatrice Taines. New York: Harper's College Press, 1975.

Hall, Elizabeth. "The Freakish Passion, A Conversation with George Steiner." *Psychology Today*, Vol. 6, No. 9 (February, 1973).

Kazantzakis, Nikos. *Spain*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1963.

Lockwood, Alan. *The San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle*, March 19, 1972.

McCabe, Charles. "Cuttlefish Prose," "Words We Can Do Without," "Nuclear Theology," and other articles from *The San Francisco Chronicle*.

Meister, Dick. "Rats, Buds, Bears and Hell?" *The San Francisco Chronicle*.

Mitford, Jessica. *The American Way of Death*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1963.

Newsweek. "The Watergate Hearings," July 22, 1974.

Newman, Edwin. *Strictly Speaking*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1974.

Orwell, George. *1984*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1949.

Orwell, George. "Politics and the English Language." In *Shooting An Elephant and Other Essays*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1950.

Steiner, George. "The Hollow Miracle." In *Language and Silence*. New York: Atheneum, 1967.

Wagner, Geoffrey. "The Language of Politics." In *Word Politics*. Edited by Max Skidmore. Palo Alto: James E. Freel and Associates, Inc., 1972.

Waugh, Evelyn. *The Loved One*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1948.